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Preparatory Committee
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Agenda item 5

STATUS OF PREPARATION OF PUBLICATIONS, STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Contribution by the Women's International Task Force (TERRA FEMINA)

The attention of the Preparatory Committee is drawn to the attached contribution by TERRA FEMINA. In January 1993 an international group of women met in Sintra, Portugal, to prepare a statement for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights. The statement, entitled "Women and Human Rights" focuses on the injustices suffered by women and calls for a new awareness of women's rights.

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STATEMENT ON WOMEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Prepared by the Women's International Task Force (TERRA FEMINA)
for the '93 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights

1. Human rights are a human creation. They grow out of the feeling of injustice which human beings experience in their bodies and minds when their humanity is abused or denied. Human rights introduce the idea of justice in the natural order of the world, thereby giving human existence a higher sense and purpose.

2. Human beings are both equal and different. The first and foremost human right is the right to existence. Humankind is made up of two sexes and this difference is the mainspring of life.

3. The acknowledgement of the existence of two sexes, equal and different, challenges the unipolar paradigm which encapsulates human diversity in the masculine mold and condemns women to social and political invisibility. This all-encompassing paradigm, based on military and economic power, science and technology, seeks to impose , for the first time in history, a single and unilateral definition of what the world and humankind should be regardless of the infinite diversity which is unique to our species.

4. At the eve of the 21st century, the irruption of the voice of women is a vital contribution to the praxis and discourse of human rights. It questions and reshapes the prevailing worldview based on the negation of the Other, of all others. Women's aspiration is not for inclusion in a sexually-indifferentiated society. Women's task and responsibility is to give full expression to their own history, culture and life experience, thus enabling humankind to regain its constituent and irrenounceable richness.

5. In today's world, the right of untold millions of women to a life with dignity is being denied by specific forms of violence and deprivation, ranging from the non-satisfaction of the most basic survival needs to rape and other forms of sexual abuse, such as wife battering, genital mutilation, kidnapping of girls, forced prostitution, selling of women by poor families, lapidation, repudiation and, most recently, the trafficking of women for sexual pleasure. The core of the ancestral role played by women in the family and community livelihood is being irrevocably disrupted by the structures of production and consumption intrinsic to the global economic order, thus leading to the evergrowing feminization of poverty. Likewise, the inalienable right of women to possess and command their own bodies is being negated by a wide array of legal and practical impediments.

6. Violence against women is widespread and long-standing. It cuts across ages and cultures, and persists unabated despite the adoption of legislation condemning most of these crimes. In the field of women's rights, the discrepancy between the legal framework and the daily reality is appalling. Women's debasement is still basically perceived as a domestic issue, a private matter. This pattern of invisibility and privatization must be overcome. The violation of women's freedom, dignity and integrity must be recognized as a major political crime. Human consciousness has yet to reach this basic realization. Today no country recognizes the right to asylum or grants refugee status on the basis of sexual discrimination or violence against women.

7. The present order of the world is inequitable and unsustainable. Globalization and uniformization coexist with and engender fragmentation and exclusion. Humankind is confronted with an unprecedented crisis of civilization. This awareness, deeply felt by a growing number of citizens of the planet, does not seem to affect either the power relations between States or the profit-oriented logic of the global economy. The weaker, the poorer, the more vulnerable, those who do not produce nor consume anything of marketable value, all these become expendable. The present order of the world excludes, rather than includes, the majority of the planet's population. Women are also deeply concerned with the power of science and technology divorced from ethics and life-sustaining values. Genetic engineering, with the risk of an unchecked manipulation of life, appears as unacceptable as the expendability of the poor and of the weak.

8. Women, who have suffered from invisibility and oppression, are in a priviledged position to denounce this dehumanization. Women, for so long kept faceless and voiceles, stand today very close to the many who are not seen, who are not able to protect and defend themselves, who are not aware of their rights and of their own value. Women, the peacemakers and guardians of the sources of life, without whose caring and nurture humankind would not be fully human, have the inescapable right and duty to challenge the prevalence of the logic of military, political and economic power over ethics and human values.

9. The new awareness of women's rights will affect all fundamental political, economic, social, cultural and civil rights. These basic changes in human rights will in turn have far-reaching effects on democracy and development. Neither democracy will be able to conceal the existence of women and men behind abstract universal principles, nor will development strategies be able to disregard in its planning, implementation and evaluation women's needs, values and inputs.

10. In today's world, the safeguarding of human rights is the permanent responsibility not only of States and international institutions but, more than ever before, of the citizens of the Earth. Only people's awareness and involvement, both at the local and global level, can really ensure the strength of this emerging human consensus which underlies the cause of human rights. Following the compass of ethical values and daily practices which enabled them to ensure the permanence of love and the quest for happiness as the matrix of human life, women are called upon today to invent, together with men, a new more compassionate common future for humankind.